

# Town of *Bethel*

## COMPREHENSIVE PLAN



Adopted and Certified: Date

Prepared By:



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## ***Town Official***

### *Town of Bethel*

President and Council: Jeff Hastings, President  
Kevin Phillips, Council  
Anna Lee Robinson, Council/Treasurer/Town Clerk  
William Rutledge, Council

Council Secretaries Patricia Kough

Planning Commission: Jack Chadwick, Chairperson  
Patricia Kough, Vice Chairperson  
Sandy Wood, Secretary  
George Anderson  
Glen Jones  
David Hillegas  
Charles Cole

Town Solicitor: John E Tarburton

## ***County and State Officials***

### *Sussex County*

County Council: Lynn Rogers, Council – 3<sup>rd</sup> District  
Dale Dukes, President – 1<sup>st</sup> District  
Finley Jones, Vice President - 2<sup>nd</sup> District  
George Cole, Council – 4<sup>th</sup> District  
Vance Phillips, Council – 5<sup>th</sup> District

County Administrator: David Baker

Director of Planning: Lawrence Lank

### *State of Delaware*

Governor: Honorable Ruth Ann Minner  
Lt Governor: Honorable John Carney  
Senate: Robert Venables  
House of Representatives: Clifford Lee

Director of State Planning: Constance C Holland, ACIP

### **Acknowledgements**

The Town of Bethel Comprehensive Plan was developed between June 2006 and August 2007 by the Town of Bethel Planning Commission with assistance from the Delaware Office of State Planning and Coordination. The following is a list of persons which the Town would like to extend its thanks for working to develop and draft this first comprehensive land use plan:

Bryan Hall, Principal Planner, State of Delaware Office of State Planning and Coordination  
Staff of the State of Delaware Office of State Planning and Coordination  
Molly Murray, Staff Reporter, News Journal  
Mary McCoy, former Planning Commission Chair  
Andy Long and Lawrence B. Steele, III, former Commission members  
Town of Bethel President and Council  
The Town of Bethel Planning Commission

In addition, the town would also like to acknowledge the efforts of those persons for their contribution in the development of this land use plan:

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Staff of Nutter Associates, Community Planners  
The State of Delaware Data-Mill Center  
Delaware Department of Transportation  
Delaware Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control  
Delaware Office of Historical and Cultural Affairs

## **A Municipal Strategy for the Town of Bethel, Delaware**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The Town of Bethel's Comprehensive Plan was developed for a variety of purposes. The town initiated the development of the Plan in June 2006. The Comprehensive Plan will provide a framework for development and growth for the town and will be used to improve land development codes for Bethel.

The Comprehensive Plan serves as an official statement about the future of the Town and as a unified advisory document for the Council and Planning Commission to address land use and growth issues. It should also be used to guide future development decisions, re-zonings, annexations, and capital improvements throughout the community. Bethel will use this plan as a basis to establish zoning codes, other land use ordinances and zoning maps.

The plan is also an informational document for the public. Citizens, business people and government officials can turn to the plan to learn more about Bethel and its policies for future land use decisions. Potential new residents may use this document as an informational resource about the Town, its characteristics, and facilities. This document contains the most current information available on population, transportation, housing, employment and the environment.

Finally, the Bethel Comprehensive Plan is a legal document. The State of Delaware Code specifies that "...any incorporated municipality under this chapter shall prepare a comprehensive plan for the city or town or portion thereof as a commission deems appropriate." The Code further specifies that "after a comprehensive plan or portion thereof has been adopted by the municipality in accordance with this chapter, the comprehensive plan shall have the force of law and no development shall be permitted except as consistent with the plan." (Chapter 702, Title 22, Delaware Code)

## **1.1 The Authority of the Plan**

Delaware law requires that municipalities engage in the comprehensive plan process for the purpose of encouraging “the most appropriate use of the fiscal and physical resources of the municipality and coordination of growth, development and infrastructure investment actions with those of other municipalities, counties and the State....” This plan was developed to comply with the requirements of a municipal development strategy as described in Delaware Code for towns with a population of 2000 or less.

The municipal development strategy for small communities; such as Bethel, with fewer than 2000 people is to be a “document in text and maps containing at a minimum, a municipal development strategy setting forth the jurisdiction’s position on population, housing growth within the community, expansion of its boundaries, development of adjacent areas, redevelopment potential, community character, and the general uses of land within the community and critical community development and infrastructure issues.” In addition, the town’s comprehensive planning process must demonstrate coordination with other municipalities, the county and the state during the plan preparation. (22 Del. C. 1953, Sec 702: 49 Del. Laws, c. 415 Sec. 1)

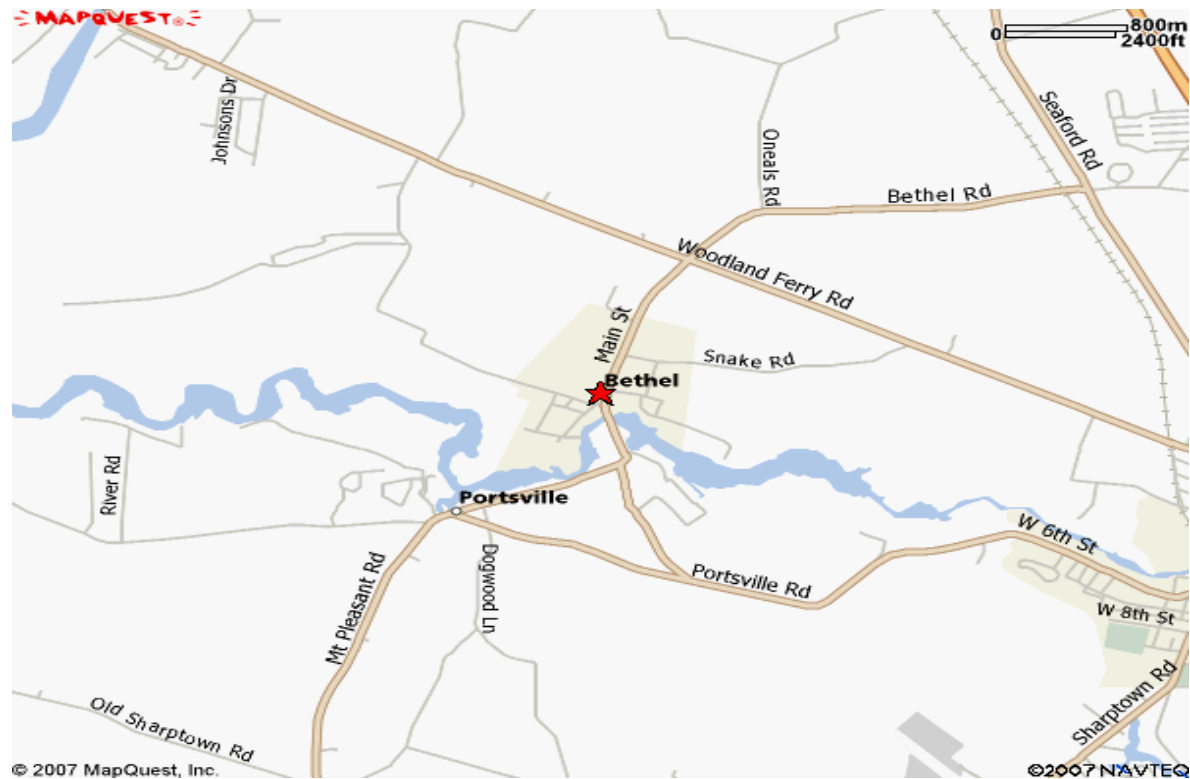
State law requires that planning be an ongoing process and that municipalities identify future planning activities. This document is Bethel’s municipal development strategy as required by law and it is intended to cover a ten-year planning period and be reviewed at least every five years.

In January 2006, the Town Council for Bethel contacted the Delaware Office of State Planning and Coordination (OSPC) to prepare the Town’s first Comprehensive Plan. The OSPC assembled a team of professional staff to work with the Town of Bethel, Town Council and Planning Commission to cooperatively craft the Town’s Comprehensive Plan.

## 1.2 A Brief Overview of the Community

### Location

The Town of Bethel is located in Sussex County Delaware, a few miles west of the Town of Laurel. Bethel is situated amidst a largely agricultural area along Broad Creek and is now recognized as a destination on the Captain John Smith Chesapeake Bay National Historic Water Trail.





## 1.2 b History of the Town of Bethel



Bethel began as Lewisville in 1840, when Kendall M. Lewis laid out 12 building lots on a farm. Lewis had built a wharf along Broad Creek and quickly had a booming trade as ships arrived from Baltimore and other Chesapeake Bay ports with housewares, tools and other goods that couldn't be found in a rural area.

Because of the deep water in Broad Creek and extensive stands of virgin oak and pine forests nearby, Lewisville grew into a shipbuilding town. In 1880, a U.S. Post Office came to town. To avoid confusion with another Lewisville in Delaware, the name was changed to Bethel, the Biblical name of the holy place where Jacob dreams of a stairway to heaven.

The real historic significance of Bethel is the connection to Delaware's maritime history, according to Brian Page, Sussex County's historic preservation planner. A unique and highly specialized sailing schooner, the "ram," was created in Bethel. It required less water depth to navigate, and that opened trade to remote and often inaccessible areas of Chesapeake Bay, Page said.

To look at Bethel today, "one would never know that at one time a thriving ship building trade ever existed there," wrote Robert H. Burgess, in his preface to Dr. James Marvil's 1961 book "Sailing Rams: A History of Sailing Ships Built in and Near Sussex County, Del." The shipbuilders used oak and then pine from local woods and eventually used teams of oxen to haul lumber from the great cypress forest near Gumboro. When the pine there was exhausted, lumber was sent in by rail from North Carolina. The giant masts – huge cedar logs – were brought in on rail cars from Oregon.

It took 90 days to build a sailing ram, a ship that was often 100 feet long or more, according to Marvil's book. When a ship was launched, schools closed and a crowd would gather as the ship was pushed down a greased ramp into the creek. "It hit the water with a big splash, causing a very large wave to travel up and down the river," Marvil wrote.

The last schooner ram was built in Bethel in 1911. The last ship was launched in 1918. Rail transportation took the place of sailing ships in the region. The area's captains and seamen continued to work in transatlantic shipping, and the ship carpenters worked in



local construction. The Bethel shipyard was dismantled in 1940.

”At one time, this little town was known around the world, next to Wilmington, because of the shipyard,” said Rudolph Hastings, a local historian who was born and raised in Bethel.



#### National Historic Place

With the shipbuilding came the rise of master carpenters. The Bethel shipbuilders used their extensive carpentry skills on boats and on houses – filling them with fine and detailed trim, Page said. “In a place like Bethel, you find these extremely beautifully, well-built houses,” he said. Bethel has so much history within its boundaries (the Town is just 1.6 miles long) that the entire municipality was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1975. This Register offers some protection from development projects that get federal dollars – such as road improvements – but it doesn’t protect historic properties when individual developers or property owners are involved, Page said.

Townpeople are also a big part of Bethel’s history. At 84, Hastings describes himself as the oldest man in Bethel. He is unique among the Bethel old-timers because his roots are in farming and not in shipbuilding. His father pioneered the cultivation of cantaloupes in Western Sussex County – a crop that now has a value of over \$1 million annually in Delaware. Hastings started a greenhouse in town, which his son, Jeff, now runs. Jeff Hastings is also the President of the Town Council. In 1912, telephones came to Bethel and Isabell Moore Bell was born. “Bethel isn’t like it used to be,” she said, noting that she had outlived many of her friends and neighbors. “But Bethel is just wonderful to me even if it’s not the same.” Former Pastor Richard Walton, the minister at Bethel’s only church – Sailor’s Bethel United Methodist – came here four years ago. Walton was born and raised in Wilmington and had never been to Bethel before he was assigned to the churches here. His first year here, he was so fascinated by the history that he encouraged the old timers to gather for a living history dinner. His only disappointment, he said, was that no one brought a video camera.

### Family-friendly Streets

The allure of the Town, besides the low property taxes found throughout Sussex County, the quaint architecture and the tree-lined streets, is that it is safe, said Town resident. Remy Haynes, who is raising two young children – ages 12 and 10 – in Bethel. Haynes moved to Bethel thirteen years ago from Long Island. Bethel has no theater, no arcade, no industry and few small businesses, although you can buy lunch and other items at the Bethel Historic Market on Main Street.

Many Bethel residents work outside of Town. Dover is a one-hour commute. Salisbury, Md., is a half-hour drive away and Seaford and Laurel are just to the northeast and southeast. The only traffic jams come when farm combines pass through town at five miles per hour. Yet today traffic and all of its concerns continue to be a growing problem for the community as more residents from within the county and from the State of Maryland use Bethel’s streets to travel within and through Sussex County.

The preceding information was developed and provided by Molly Murray of the News Journal – Sussex County Office. Molly may be reached at 856-7372 or [mmurray@delawareonline.com](mailto:mmurray@delawareonline.com). The Office of State Planning and Coordination and the Town of Bethel extends its thanks to Molly and her contribution to this process.

### Historical District and Historical Properties within Bethel

As a result of efforts from the residents of Bethel and the State, The Bethel Historic District created in September 1974 encompasses all lands within the current defined Town boundary and implies historical consideration is given to all homes over 50 years in age. In addition, there are several homes that are considered to be of significant historical value; a few of these homes are:

#### Locations

West Main Street Historical Streetscape  
Streetscape featuring Inslay House  
Streetscape featuring Ship Carpenter’s House

#### Homes & Properties

Williams House	Ship Carpenter’s House
4 R’s Farm	Moore House
Inslay House	

### 1.3 Existing Land Uses

A land use survey was conducted in Bethel on September 30, 2006 by the Delaware Office of State Planning and Coordination staff to determine the current land use within the Town limits and the land surrounding the Town. The results of the land use survey can be seen in Table 1.1.

#### 1.3a Land within Bethel

Table 1 gives an overview of the current land use situation in Bethel. The most common use of land is residential, followed next by agricultural/natural resources/open space. It is interesting to note that the natural resources/open space parcels are only 17% of the total parcels in town, but are 66% of the total land. Residential uses contrast this, being 75% of the total parcels in Town, but only 27% of the total land in the Town limits.

**Table 1.1 Existing Land Use in Bethel, 2006**

Land Use	Parcels	% Total Parcels	Area	% Area
Ag/NR/Open Space	25	17.0	198	66.0
Residential	108	75.0	82	27.0
Commercial	4	3.0	14	5.0
Institutional	7	5.0	6	2.0
<b>Total</b>	144	100.0	300	100.0

Source: Town of Bethel Land Use Survey as prepared by OSPC, 2006.

#### 1.3b Adjacent Land Uses

Nearly all the land uses adjacent to the community are rural in nature. Most of the lands to the east, north and west are used for agricultural purposes, while the southern portion of the Town is bordered by Broad Creek. It should be noted that lands to the south of Town, are mostly residential, a mix of single family homes, a major subdivision named Broad Creek Estates and state wildlife management lands.

All of the lands surrounding the Town are within the jurisdiction of Sussex County and are zoned Agriculture/Residential 1 (AR-1). This zoning classification allows agricultural use as well as residential use on lots as small as a half acre depending upon the size of

the subdivision and the types of public utilities available to the site. However, both the Sussex County Comprehensive Plan and the Strategies for State Policies and Spending designate the area surrounding Bethel as a predominately rural area. Because of this designation, no new major infrastructure improvements are proposed at this time by the state or county.

In addition, some of the areas surrounding the community are either in part of the State's Agricultural Preservation Program, where development rights have been purchased or are part of the Delaware Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control (DNREC) Division of Fish and Wildlife, such as the Nanticoke Wildlife Management Area.

#### **1.4 Public Participation**

Residents of Bethel were given the opportunity to provide their input for the comprehensive plan process through a community planning questionnaire that was distributed January 2007 and two public participation meetings held in March 2006 and March 2007.

##### *1.4a Community Planning Questionnaire*

The community planning questionnaire was distributed to all the Town's residents in January 2007. There were 66 responses received from the 111 mailers sent to addresses in the town, representing a 59% response rate; an outstanding participation rate for a community with less than 200 persons. The purpose of the survey was to respond to key issues Bethel residents thought may impact the future of their way of life and following is a summary of the questionnaire results.

- Of the 184 residents over 120 residents were recognized within the demographic survey of the community. Much like Sussex County, the majority are over the age of 50 and own their own homes.
- When asked to consider the community character, 39 survey responses wanted the community to remain the same; while 28 responses asked for modest change.
- Keeping with community character; 52 responses supported Residential followed by Agricultural uses (34) and Open Space (23). Many community responses support commercial and industrial uses. The community expressed a need for these uses to be tempered and in tune with the existing uses.

- Many residents favored the overall community land use to be consistent with the existing residential housing types. The community's zoning codes will require revision to meet this goal.
- While considering future population; the majority (42 survey responses) felt the population should stay at or near 200 residents.
- Residents also considered whether to improve community infrastructure; most responses (38) reflected a desire to improve the community's park facilities and perhaps discuss the need for sidewalks and future wastewater concerns.
- While continuing to consider infrastructure needs, many residents expressed concerns regarding cost and felt that the Town should consider developing measures to protect the Town's resources.
- When asked to consider annexation by the community; over 50 residents did not favor this approach for Bethel. Yet 16 of the 50 responses did request the Town not to fully reject annexation. Several responses favored this option as necessary to further control the Town's future growth.
- The community recognized the need to improve the zoning codes. Over 50 survey responses called for this to be the next step for the community's planning efforts.
- Many residents felt the zoning code should reflect the existing height and design characteristics of existing homes and businesses.
- When asked to consider historical character and the development of ordinances to protect these resources, the community was nearly split with 36 for and 33 against.
- Finally, many residents felt Broad Creek is an important resource to the community that should be protected.

#### *1.4b Public Meeting Participation*

The public participation meetings were well attended by residents. These meeting; one in March of 2006 and again in March of 2007 allowed residents to interact with officials to discuss their likes, concerns and ideas for improving Bethel; such as:

Many residents agreed, “Bethel should be left alone and stay the same.”

Some residents felt, “growth was going to occur and we should begin to think proactively and improve the community’s resources to better control it in the future.”

Others expressed concern with the type of growth, “the growth that has occurred in Seaford and Bridgeville is something that should not occur here.”

While others felt the need to preserve the cultural resources, “we should protect the historical structures in town and we should adopt Woodland Ferry to ensure its place within the community.”

All of the community echoed concerns regarding traffic, “it is getting worse and the community should work to correct this problem.” In addition, similar concerns were raised regarding the need to improve infrastructure such as streets and wastewater service, etc.

### **1.5 Bethel’s Planning Goal and Vision**

#### **Planning Goals**

Goal: To maintain the small town atmosphere and rural setting through the adoption of appropriate zoning and land use ordinances.

Goal: To encourage modest growth that is in tune with existing growth within the community.

Goal: To preserve the rural atmosphere by balancing the protection of rural land with the needs of residents.

Goal: To restore and maintain Broad Creek so it continues to be a source of recreation and economic opportunity to the community.

Goal: To ensure the protection of natural resources for the enjoyment and health of the existing and future residents of the community.

Goal: To encourage the development and implementation of a historical preservation program to protect these cultural resource within the community.

#### Vision for Bethel

Bethel is a small historic, rural town with a rich history of agricultural and maritime heritage that will maintain its small town character while allowing for modest growth and redevelopment that is consistent with its surroundings and current community character.



## **Chapter Two – Municipal Development Strategy**

### **2.1 Town Governance, Land Use Planning and Regulation Process**

The Town of Bethel was incorporated in 1886 by the Delaware General Assembly. A five member town council governs the Town and elections are held the fourth Saturday in February. Council members are elected for rotating terms lasting three years each. Elections are held annually by the Town. The minimum requirements for councilman are determined by the Town's charter and any person considered for the council must be a Delaware resident, a Bethel resident and over the age of eighteen.

The Town of Bethel Community Hall is located on Bethel Road and serves as the town hall for all public meetings. Various organizations often use this facility to conduct business to support the town. One example is the Planning and Zoning Commission. In addition, the Town operates a small part-time office in the Bethel Community Hall. In addition, the Bethel Historical Society operates a local museum at the site of the old school house dedicated to the history of Bethel and the surrounding region. This group provides insight to the Town on certain historical uses and supplements the activities of the Town.

The Town Council conducts Town business and provides review and comment on all current and future land use activities within the Town. Buildings and new developments must adhere to the current zoning codes in place. These codes have not been updated since 1972 and should be updated to meet all current building codes and desires of Bethel's residents.

The Town of Bethel Charter serves as the guiding legal document for the Town. The document continues to support the needs of the community; however, the Town may wish to review this document to ensure that this document continues to support the needs of the Town.

#### *2.1a Recommendations, Town Governance, Land Use Planning and Regulation Process*

**Plan Adoption.** It is recommended that the Town of Bethel adopt this plan and seek certification through the Office of State Planning and Coordination. This plan will serve as a unified advisory document for land use and growth issues within Bethel. More importantly, it will serve as the basis for the updating of the Town's current zoning codes and land use regulations.

**Develop and Improve Zoning and Land Use Regulation.** In order for the Town to continue to allow development within the community, it is recommended that the Town update its current zoning code to meet the wishes of the community and current building

standards. These regulations must be in place within eighteen (18) months of the plan adoption in accordance with state law. These zoning codes and land use regulations should address coordination with local, county and state agencies, permitting design, and compliance with relevant environmental regulations.

**Develop the capacity to administer land use regulation.** When developing or improving the Town’s land use regulations, Bethel should consider the capacity to administer these regulations in a fair and consistent manner. Due to the fact the Town has only voluntary part-time staff, it may consider further developing its partnership with the local jurisdictions such as Sussex County or a private consultant.

**Evaluate governance capabilities.** Currently the Town relies on part-time voluntary staff, contractual services and volunteer efforts from the community. It is important for the Town to periodically ensure these services meet the needs of the community.

**Revise and modernize the Town Charter.** The Town Charter continues to serve as the guiding legal document for the Town. It is important that this “living document” be reviewed and updated periodically to ensure it continues to meet the needs of the community.

## **2.2 Demographics, Future Population and Housing Growth**

Data on population, demographics, housing and economic conditions in Bethel are outlined in the following section, along with the appropriate comparisons to Sussex County and the State of Delaware.

The United States Census has been the primary data source for such information. Data is taken from Summary File 1 (SF-1) and Summary File 3 (SF-3). SF-1 is a direct information count considered to be very reliable, while SF-3 is an estimate based upon sample data, which is less accurate for towns like Bethel with small populations.

### *2.2a Population and Housing*

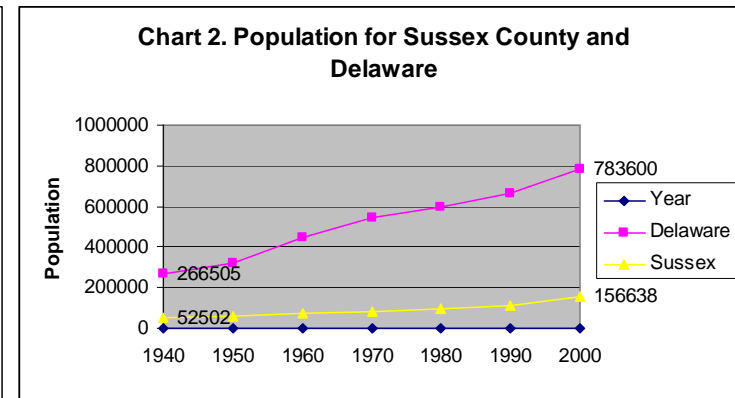
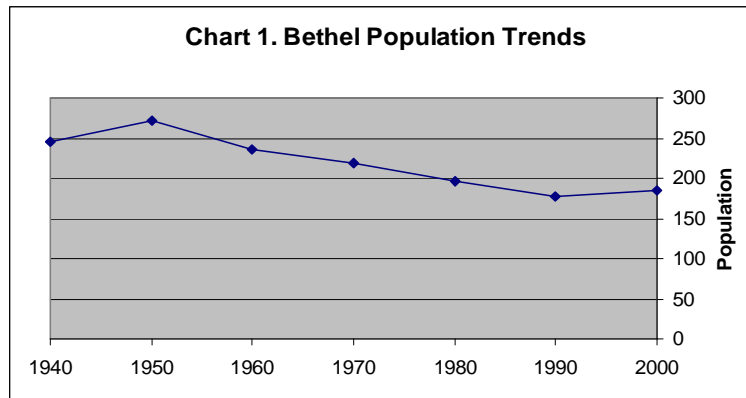
The U.S. Census is intended to be a count of all persons, though errors, omissions and over-counts undoubtedly occur. While small errors have minimal effect on large populations, the same inaccuracies significantly impact small populations, such as Bethel, creating questions regarding the validity of the data collected.

***The information presented about Bethel, especially from Summary File 03, is subject to error and should be taken at face value ONLY.*** Additionally, factors ranging from government policies to economic conditions can alter trends and eventually affect population projections. However, the statistics are included for the value gained by comparing them to state and county level data to illustrate demographic and population trends.

A review of the information collected through the U.S. Census indicates that from 1940 to 2000, while the population in Delaware and Sussex County has steadily increased, the population of Bethel has fluctuated with an overall decrease in population. The Town's population peaked in 1950 at 271 persons.

The 1990 Census reported 174 people living in Bethel and the 2000 Census data shows Bethel's population increased by 10 persons or 6%. During the same time frame, Sussex County's population grew from 113,229 to 156,638, and increase of 28%. Additionally, the State's population grew by 18% from 666,618 in 1990 to 783,600 in 2000. Bethel's total population in 2000 was 184 persons, of which 47.3% were male and 52.7% were female.

The following charts show the population trends for Bethel, Sussex County, and the State. Chart 1 shows the population trends for Bethel over the period of 1940 to 2000. Chart 2 shows the population for Sussex County and the State of Delaware for the same time period.



**Source: US Census 1940 – 2000**

## 2.2b Population Projections

Population projections for areas as small as the Town of Bethel are very valuable in planning for future growth but are extremely difficult to calculate since a single large housing development could have a significant impact on the Town's future growth rate.

The population projection in Table 2 has been prepared using the 2000 US Census information and growth rates from the Delaware Population Consortium estimates for population growth in Sussex County, under the assumption that Bethel will grow at a more modest rate than the current growth rate projected for Sussex County based upon the direction provided by local residents and the lack of key infrastructure elements such as central sewer and water.

**Table 2. Future Population Projections**

<b>Population Projection by Year</b>							
Year	2000	2005	2010	2015	2020	2025	2030
Sussex	156,038	172,890	191,562	212,251	235,174	260,573	288,715
Bethel	184	187	190	192	195	198	201

As previously mentioned, some US Census information may be inaccurate for small towns such as Bethel. This appears to be the case regarding the total housing units count found in the 2000 Census for Bethel which reflected 106 housing units within the Town. For this reason, the housing projections below are based upon the September 2006 Land Use Survey, which showed 108 units in Bethel. The growth rate used in Table 3 is developed based upon current housing stocking data and compared against current population trends. Again, this estimate is under the assumption that the Town of Bethel will grow at a slower rate than that of Sussex County due to its location within the county and lack of key infrastructure elements such as central sewer and water.

**Table 3. Housing Projections**

<b>Housing Projection by Year</b>						
Year	2006	2010	2015	2020	2025	2030
Bethel	108	109	110	111	112	113

These projections show Bethel's population increasing to 192 by the year 2015 and to 201 by the year 2030. The population increase would create nearly 4 new homes by 2015 and 6 new homes by 2030.

Another way to project population is to calculate how many people a full build-out of Bethel's developable land would contribute to the population. Full development of agriculture and open space parcels within the Town would result in 250 new homes. Assuming these 250 homes have an average household size of 2.24 people, once all these homes are occupied the total population in Bethel would increase by about 560 people, bringing the total population to 744. Combining the build-out analysis with the population projections shows that unless there is future annexation, all available land in Bethel could be fully developed by the year 2020. (Is this accurate? If you project 113 residents by 2030, that is way fewer than the 560 increase with a build-out)

### *2.2c Position on Population and Housing Growth*

Bethel is a small community located in a rural area in western Sussex County within actively farmed agricultural land and environmentally sensitive forest and wetlands. The Town has no central water system and is not situated in a location conducive to substantial future growth. Bethel is interested in encouraging homeownership to new and existing Town residents and will support modest housing growth and development on available land located within the Town's boundaries that will further their goal to preserve the historic nature and feel of the community.

### *2.2d Racial Composition*

In 1990, Bethel was very homogenous with a 90% white population, contrasting with Sussex County and the State of Delaware which had a population of 79% white and 80% white respectively, as seen in Table 4. Census 2000 data indicates that Bethel remained nearly the same during the 1990's as white population as a percentage of the total population increased from 90% in 1990 to 96% in 2000. During the same period, the black population decreased from 4% in 1990 to 2% in the year 2000. Bethel is still more homogenous than Sussex County and the State of Delaware, which also are becoming more diverse, as seen in Table 4.

**Table 4. Racial Composition of Bethel, Sussex County and State of Delaware (Source: US Census 1940 – 2000)**

	<b>Bethel</b>		<b>Sussex County</b>		<b>Delaware</b>	
<b>Race</b>	<b>1990</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>1990</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>1990</b>	<b>2000</b>
White	90.4%	96.2%	82.5%	80.36%	81.68%	79.53%
Black	4.77%	2.7%	16.96%	41.89%	17.17%	19.23%
Other	4.83%	1.6%	.54%	4.76%	1.15%	6.15%

## 2.2e Age Profile

Census 2000 indicates that the median age of Bethel residents is 44.3 years, slightly older than that of Sussex County (36.4 years) and Delaware (32.9 years). Table 5 shows the age distribution for Bethel, Sussex County and Delaware.

**Table 5. Age Profiles for Bethel, Sussex County and State of Delaware, Census 2000 (Source: US Census 1940 – 2000)**

Age	Bethel		Sussex County		State of Delaware	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
<5	10	5.4%	9,009	5.8%	51,531	6.6%
5-9	12	3.5%	9,930	6.4%	55,813	7.1%
10-14	13	7.1%	10,250	6.5%	55,274	7.1%
15-19	8	4.3%	9,480	6.1%	55,632	7.1%
20-24	9	4.9%	7,556	4.8%	51,665	6.6%
25-34	18	9.8%	17,811	11.4%	108,840	13.9%
35-44	26	14.1%	23,425	15.0%	127,601	16.3%
45-54	38	20.7%	21,312	13.6%	103,999	13.3%
55-59	11	6.0%	9,615	6.1%	39,320	5.0%
60-64	4	2.2%	9,198	5.9%	32,199	4.1%
64-74	15	8.2%	17,091	10.9%	56,415	7.5%
75-84	13	7.1%	9,362	6.0%	34,762	4.4%
85+	7	3.8%	2,569	1.6%	10,549	1.3%

Since the 1990 Census, a substantial change has occurred in Bethel's child population (0-17). In 1990, the total child population in Bethel was about 11% of the total population, slightly less than both Sussex County (16 %) and the State of Delaware (19 %). The 2000 Census indicates that the child population as a percentage of the total population in Bethel increased some over the past decade to 18%, while over the same period the child population as a percentage of the total population in Sussex County and the state remained somewhat unchanged.

## 2.2f Educational Attainment

The average educational level of Bethel's population age 25 or older differs from that of Sussex County and the State, as seen in Table 6. According to the 2000 Census, 95 % of Bethel's residents 25 years of age or older have at least completed a high school education, compared to 70 % of Sussex County residents and 78 % of Delaware residents. Table 6 also shows how the percentage of Bethel residents age 25 or older who have earned a bachelor's degree or higher differs from that of Sussex County and the state.

**Table 6. Educational Attainment for Bethel, Sussex County and Delaware, 2000 (Source: US Census 2000)**

	<b>High School Graduate or higher</b>	<b>Bachelor's Degree or higher</b>
Bethel	94.8%	29.6%
Sussex County	69.7%	13.4%
State of Delaware	77.5%	21.4%

## 2.2g Housing



Table 7 compares Bethel's total housing unit changes to those of Sussex County and the State of Delaware, as recorded by the US Census Bureau. Bethel experienced little growth from 1970 to 1980, during which time the housing stock in both Sussex County and the State of Delaware increased significantly. From 1990 to 2000, there was a net gain of 6 dwelling units in Bethel, an increase of 6 %, in conjunction with the positive housing growth rate in Sussex County (25.3 %) and Delaware (18.3%). Changes in the State and the County are consistent with population trends during the same time period, while the inconsistency seen in Bethel's population growth and housing decline is likely due to US Census errors.



**Table 7. Dwelling Units in Bethel, Sussex County and Delaware, 1970 – 2000 (Source: US Census 1970 – 2007)**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Bethel</b>	<b>Change</b>	<b>Sussex</b>	<b>Change</b>	<b>Delaware</b>	<b>Change</b>
1970	78	****	34,287	****	180,233	****
1980	88	11%	54,694	59.5%	238,611	32.4%
1990	95	7%	74,253	35.8%	289,919	21.5%
2000	101	6%	93,070	25.3%	343,072	18.3%
2007	108	6%	*****	*****	*****	*****

As previously noted, US Census results for Bethel are likely to be inaccurate due to the extremely small population size. A field survey of housing units in September 2006, conducted by the State Planning Office, demonstrates that there are approximately 108 residential dwelling units in Bethel. Thus, any recorded loss in housing stock since 1990 was either a miscalculation, or has been offset by new dwelling units in the Town since the 2000 Census.

#### *Type of Housing Stock*

Table 8 and Table 9 summarize changes in the types of housing in Bethel, Sussex County and the State. In 1990, 100% of the housing in Bethel was single family housing, which was significantly higher than the same type of housing units in Sussex County (69%) and in the State of Delaware (54%).

Census 2000 reported the total housing units in Bethel increased by 9 units from 1990 to 2000, but the percentage of single family detached housing units remained constant at 100%. Similarly, both Sussex County and Delaware experienced increases in the number of single-family detached dwellings as a percentage of the total housing units during a ten year period.

**Table 8. Composition of Housing in Bethel, Sussex County and Delaware in 1990 (Source: US Census 1990 – 2000)**

Housing Types	Bethel		Sussex County		State of Delaware	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Single Family Detached	92	100%	42,525	57.3%	155,805	53.7%
Single Family Attached	0	0%	3,381	4.6%	40,576	14.0%
Multi – Family	0	0%	6,765	8.9%	56,679	19.5%
Mobile Homes	0	0%	21,410	28.5%	34,726	12.0%
Other	0	0%	442	<1.0%	2,133	<1.0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>92</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>74,253</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>289,919</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Table 9. Composition of Housing in Bethel 2000 (Source: US Census 2000)**

Housing Types	Bethel		Sussex County		Delaware	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Single Family Detached	101	100	61,175	57.0%	210,872	56.0%
Single Family Attached	0	0	6,522	6.0%	52,430	14.0%
Multi – Family	0	0	13,173	12.0%	69,058	18.0%
Mobile Homes	0	0	26,210	24.0%	42,122	11.0%
Other	0	0	39	1.0%	366	1.0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>101</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>107,119</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>374,872</b>	<b>100%</b>

It should be noted here that the total number of housing units in Bethel varies between Table 8 and Table 9 largely as a result of census errors due to the small population size of Bethel. Please keep in mind that there are actually about 108 residential dwellings in Bethel as of September 2006.

### *Housing Pipeline*

Development activity in and around Bethel is minimal. There is one known large planned development proposed for construction near the Town and there are currently only a few single family homes either considered for construction or being constructed at this time within the Town.

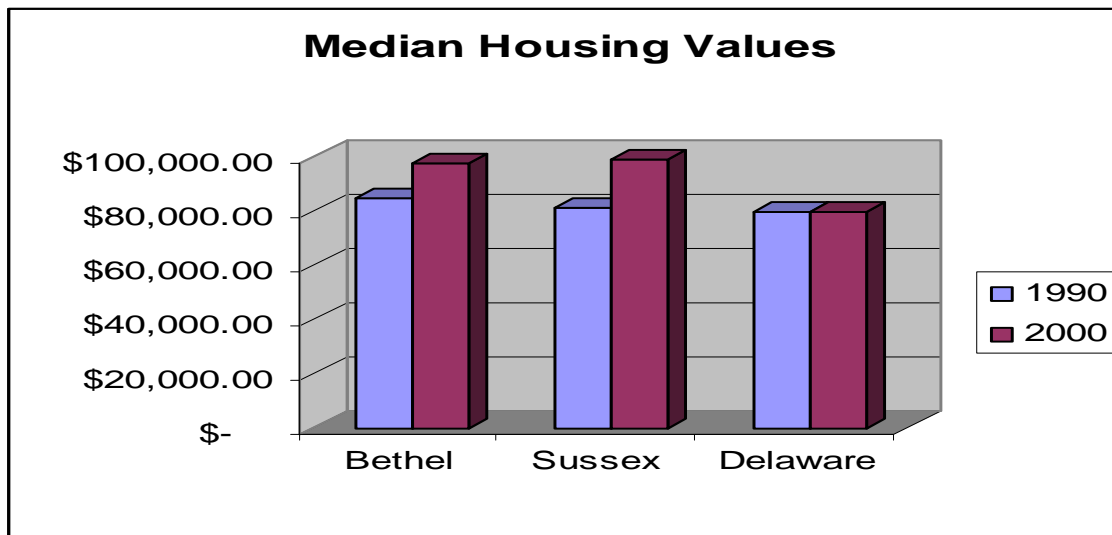
### *Age of Housing Stock*

Bethel has retained many of its older structures. The 2000 Census reports that 65% of Bethel's houses were built before 1939, while only 9% of the Town's structures were built between 1939 and 1959. Sussex County with a mean housing age of 1976 and Delaware with a mean housing age of 1973 have relatively younger housing stock.

### *Housing Values*

Chart 3 compares Bethel's 1990 and 2000 median housing value with housing values in Sussex County and the State of Delaware. With a value of owner-occupied housing units of \$84,300 in 1990 and \$97,600 in 2000, Bethel has a similar median housing value as that of Sussex County (\$81,000 in 1990 and \$98,500 in 2000) and Delaware (\$79,600 in 1990 and \$91,300 in 2000).

**Chart 3. Median Housing Values for Bethel, Sussex County and Delaware, 1990 & 2000**



### *Ownership and Vacancy*

When one considers vacant homes, owner occupied units and renter occupied units found in Bethel with those in Sussex County and the State, Bethel fares quite well with fewer renters and more homeowners than Sussex County and Delaware. Bethel posts a vacancy rate lower than Sussex County and lower than the State.

### *2.2h Economic Profile*

This section discusses economic information for Bethel, Sussex County and Delaware. Bethel's medium income in 1999 was \$34,107, 26% higher than the medium household income in Sussex County (\$26,904) and 2% lower than that of the state (\$34,875). Census information indicates Bethel has a lower percentage rate of households receiving Social Security and retirement than Sussex County or the State. Of the households in Bethel 15.2% receive Social Security income, while the percentage for the County is higher at 34.9% and to the percentage for the state is higher at 23.8%. Most Bethel residents receive less than the average amount of retirement income at 11.4% than Sussex County at 21.5%, while the State is significantly lower at 5.2%. Of Bethel residents 2.7% are below the poverty level, compared to the State average of 9%. No seniors (65+) in Bethel are below the poverty level. Some of Bethel's residents do receive some type of public assistance.

**Table 10. Selected Income Data for Bethel, Sussex County and Delaware 2000 Census (Source: US Census 2000)**

<b>Income Category</b>	<b>Bethel</b>	<b>Sussex</b>	<b>Delaware</b>
Median household income	\$34,107	\$26,904	\$34,875
% of households with wage and salary income	30.5%	72.7%	80.8%
Mean wage and salary income	\$65,571	\$31,028	\$40,493
% of households with Social Security income	15.2%	34.9%	23.8%
Mean Social Security income	\$11,900	\$7,893	\$8,038
% of households w/ retirement income	11.4%	21.5%	5.2%
Mean retirement income	\$16,357	\$9,843	\$9,987
% of households with public assistance income	1.1%	6.8%	5.2%
Mean public assistance income	\$7,450	\$3,707	\$4,012
% of population below poverty level	2.7%	10.7%	8.7%
% of seniors (65+) below poverty level	N/A	12.2%	10.1%

Of the 184 residents over the age of 16 living in town, 149 persons or 81% are part of the work force and 35 persons or 19% are not part of the work force. Of those residents who are part of the work force, 5 persons or 3.4% were unemployed at the time of the 2000 census. Chart 4 shows the number of residents in Bethel that commute daily.

**Chart 4. Method of Community to Work for Bethel Residents, 2000**

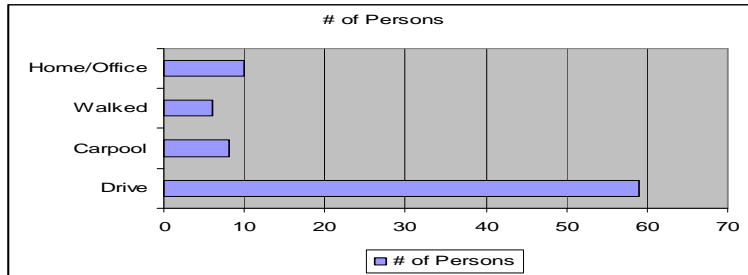


Table 11 shows that the workers in Bethel take part in a variety of industries, the most prevalent of which is education, health and social service (21.7%)., Professional scientific, management, administrative, waste management services (16.9%) and manufacturing (14.5%) are also popular employment fields.

**Table 11. Industry of Workers 16 Years and Older (Source: US Census 2000)**

<b>Industry</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting, and mining	4	4.8%
Construction	9	10.8%
Manufacturing	12	14.5%
Wholesale trade	0	0%
Retail trade	11	13.3%
Transportation and warehousing and utilities	2	2.4%
Information	2	2.4%
Finance, insurance, real estate and rental and leasing	1	1.2%
Professional scientific, management, administrative, and waste management services	14	16.9%
Educational, health and social services	18	21.7%
Arts, entertainment, recreation, accommodation and food services	4	4.8%
Other service (except public administration)	2	2.4%
Public administration	4	4.8%
<b>Total</b>	<b>83</b>	<b>100%</b>

### *2.2i Conclusion*

The population and demographic information derived from the US Census is highly variable due to the extremely small population size in Bethel. However, when compared to similar data at the County and State level, some interesting trends emerge. The average education in Bethel is higher than the county. The percentage of residents in Bethel who own their own home is higher than the County. While the State and the County experienced substantial increases in their housing stock from 1990 to 2000, Bethel experienced little growth. From 1990 to 2000, the child population in Bethel grew at a much slower rate than average. During the same time period the median age of Bethel residents was slightly higher or the same as the County and State average.

## 2.3 Environmental Features



The Town of Bethel is located along Broad Creek within the larger Nanticoke Watershed in western Sussex County and is surrounded by a mix of forest and agricultural lands. Lands to the east and north are considered to be either good to excellent recharge areas for groundwater recharge. Having no improved water or sewer infrastructure; the Town relies on independent wells and stand alone septic systems to meet the needs of local residents.

### 2.3a Floodplains and Wetlands

Located in close proximity to Broad Creek, it is no surprise that the Town of Bethel contains both wetlands and floodplains. The flood plain follows Broad Creek and only a small portion of the Town is located within the AE classified flood zone. According to the *Sussex County On-Line Data Mapping Service*, the small segment of the community affected by potential flooding is affected by the 100 year flood event.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) is the government agency responsible for the regulation of flood plains. Their regulation states that once a town located within a floodplain has an approved flood ordinance, FEMA will then provide a map of the municipality showing exactly which land parcels are a part of the flood plain. Residents will then be eligible for flood insurance, which is required by many mortgage loans. Bethel participates with Sussex County in a flood plain ordinance, which is administered by Sussex County, qualifying the Town to be officially documented by FEMA on the flood plain map.

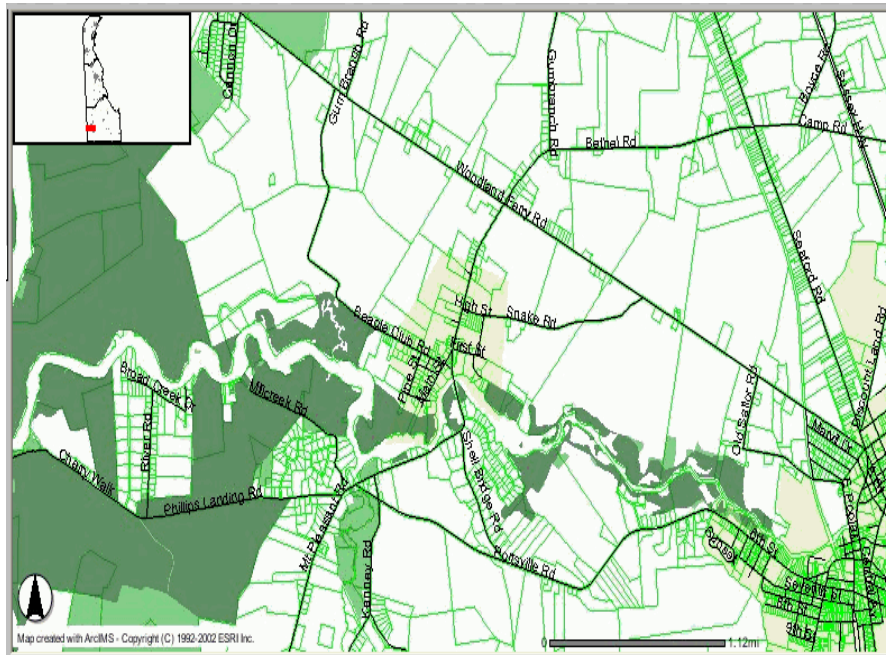
### 2.3b Soils

The *USDA-NRCS Soil Survey for Sussex County, Delaware (1972)* shows the majority of soil within and around Bethel is classified as Evesboro Series, Evesboro sandy loam, substratum, 0-2 percent slope (EvA); which consists of very deep, excessively drained, sandy soils on uplands dominated by mainly hardwood vegetation mixed with some Virginia and Loblolly pine. This soil is often dry and less fertile, but less so in Evesboro soils with a loamy stratum. This series is best suited for most major crops and is less likely to erode from water; however, it is subject to wind erosion.



### 2.3c State Resource Areas (SRA's)

The Delaware Land Protection Act authorizes the mapping of State Resource Areas (SRAs), which are open space lands that are valued for their natural, cultural, and geological significance, so that the maps can be used to guide county and municipal comprehensive land use planning.



The State of Delaware Code Title 22, Section 702 recommends that municipalities implement comprehensive planning programs that achieve the most appropriate use of land, water, and resources consistent with the public interest and deal effectively with future problems that may result from the use and development of land within their jurisdictions. Through the comprehensive planning process, municipalities should conserve, develop, utilize, and protect natural resources within their jurisdictions. Specifically, the municipal comprehensive plan should include maps that depict natural areas and include policy recommendations for the conservation, use, and protection of natural resources.

The community of Bethel through this comprehensive plan acknowledges those SRA's identified within adjacent map and the following eight Ecological Guidelines that the Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control (DNREC) has embraced as its core policy for natural resource protection:

- 1) Maintain large areas of contiguous habitat and avoid fragmenting these areas;
- 2) Maintain meaningful wildlife corridors and potential non-consumptive bicycle and pedestrian connections between habitat areas and adjacent land uses;
- 3) Protect rare landscape elements, sensitive areas, and associated species;
- 4) Allow natural patterns of disturbance to continue to maintain diversity and resilience of habitat types;

- 5) Minimize direct and indirect human disturbances and the introduction and spread of nonnative species and favor native plants and animals;
- 6) Minimize human introduction of nutrients, chemicals, and pollutants;
- 7) Avoid land uses that deplete natural resources over a broad area and allocating such land uses to areas of minimal natural resource impacts; and
- 8) Compensate for adverse effects of development on natural processes.

The Ecological Society of America first developed these Ecological Guidelines to facilitate incorporation of ecological considerations into land use decision making (Dale et al, 2000). Subsequently, the Environmental Law Institute retooled these guidelines to apply directly to local land use planning decisions (McElfish, 2004). The eight guidelines above allow local decision making to be examined in two overarching dimensions:

- The impacts of local decisions in a regional context, and
- The impacts of local decisions over time considering foreseeable future changes in the landscape.

#### *2.3d State Wildlife Areas*

The community of Bethel is located near several Delaware Fish and Wildlife Properties that are a part of the Nanticoke Wildlife Area. These properties to the west and south of Town provide a variety of recreational opportunity; the most popular of which are hunting and fishing.

#### *2.3e Broad Creek*

Broad Creek is a valuable asset to the community. Much of the Town's history is tied to the use and the mix of resources that abound from within the river. The Town currently maintains a river access point for fishing. In addition, the Town is concerned with the long-term health of this resource from excessive boat traffic that erodes the banks, marshes and wetlands of this resource. The Town will work to partner with DNREC and other agencies to protect this resource and improve the overall health and safety of this resource.

### *2.3f Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDL's)*

DNREC is currently working within the Nanticoke watershed to develop “Total Maximum Daily Load” (TMDL) values. The goal of this effort is to reduce the total maximum daily load of nutrient pollutants that enter into the watershed. A TMDL is the maximum level of pollution which a water body may assimilate without compromising its quality, drinking water, shell fish harvest and recreational goals, such as, swimming and fishing. TMDL's are currently undergoing development for the Nanticoke/Broad Creek watershed and should be completed about December 2008. To support this effort, DNREC recommends best management practices (BMP's) for all land uses. Pollution Control Strategies being developed by DNREC will help to pinpoint some of these BMP's that will work to reduce both point and nonpoint source pollutants, such as, agricultural run-off and the removal of failing septic systems.

### *2.3g Urban and Community Forestry Program*

The Delaware Department of Agriculture Forest Service Urban and Community Forestry Program provides technical, educational and financial resources to develop and improve urban forest resources. Urban forest resources provide a mix of benefits, such as, increasing property values, reducing air and water pollution, reducing crime and improving the quality of life for community residents. The community of Bethel has an opportunity to increase these resources from the current forest canopy value (or percent of land within the Town covered by trees) from 14% to 20% over the next ten years by developing local ordinances, encouraging the planting of trees within new development projects and by becoming a Tree City USA Community.

### *2.3h Recommendations, Environmental Features*

- **Work with DNREC, Sussex County and FEMA to update Flood Plain Maps.** Residents would benefit from the continued partnership to address the necessary update of the FEMA flood plain maps.
- **Work with DNREC and Sussex County to protect natural resources.** The community would meet many of the residents' interests by expanding this partnership to further protect and enhances these resources.
- **Continue to utilize, protect and conserve Broad Creek.** The community's history and heritage is tied to this resource. The community should explore opportunities to promote this resource while providing possible protective measures.

- **Work with DNREC to develop TMDL's for the Nanticoke River/Broad Creek Watershed.** The Nanticoke River and Broad Creek are under review for pollutants. The community should consider how to best address this issue through conservation measures, possible regulation, etc.
- **Work with the Delaware Forest Service to expand Urban Forestry activities.** This partnership would provide the opportunity to expand forest resources while educating residents. The community should work to become a Tree City USA community further enhancing the quality of life for residents.

## **2.4 Future Land Use**

The Town of Bethel contains a variety of land uses as described in Section 1.3. While the majority of land use is either residential or agricultural, there are several properties devoted to commercial and institutional purposes. The future land uses for the Town are shown on Map 3. Following is a description of each land use category and the policies that will guide the Town when implementing land use regulations and future development proposals in each area. The Future Land Use plan is comprised of both written policies and the map, and neither should be used without reviewing the other.

### *2.4a Growth inside Bethel*

There are currently about 250 +/- acres of land that are vacant or in agricultural use inside the Town boundaries of Bethel, representing roughly half of the total area of the Town. While not all of this land is available for development due to environmental constraints, it does represent a substantial amount of land that can be developed for residential or commercial uses. The Town of Bethel will consider the development of these lands consistent with the Future Land Use Plan described in this section and within the constraints of the utility infrastructure described in Section 2.7.

### *2.4b Residential Land Uses*

The majority of the Town is designated for future residential land uses. This generally includes all lands that were found to contain existing single family homes and lands that are currently in agricultural production. It is the intent of the Town that these areas will either remain as single family homes or be developed from agricultural use into housing that is consistent with the character of the Town. Here are some general policies that will guide residential land uses in Bethel:

- The preservation and rehabilitation of existing homes in Bethel is encouraged.
- Homeownership will be encouraged throughout Town.

#### *2.4 c Commercial Land Uses*

The majority of commercial uses in Bethel are located along Bethel Road and Main Street in the northern and central parts of Town. The future land use plan proposes to concentrate the Town's commercial activity in these areas of Town. There are only a few commercial properties currently in Town, and future commercial uses will be encouraged to occupy the central and northern end of Town. Here are some general policies that will guide commercial properties in Bethel:

- To promote and encourage continued agricultural businesses within the town.
- Existing commercial uses will be allowed to continue to operate.
- No large-scale, regional retail uses are desired by Town residents. It is desirable to promote restaurants, retail stores, and recreational uses that provide needed goods, services, and jobs to the Town.

#### *2.4d Institutional Land Uses*

There are a number of institutional uses in Town. It is the intent of the Town to encourage their continued operation and role in the community by designating them for future institutional purposes. The institutional properties include the Church, the Bethel Community Center, Bethel Post Office, the Bethel Museum Community Park and Bethel Community Pier. Here are some general policies that will guide institutional land uses in Bethel:

- Existing institutional properties will be encouraged to continue their roles in the community and be allowed to grow and expand in a reasonable fashion that is consistent with the character of Bethel.
- Any new institutional uses will be considered by the Bethel Town Council and the Planning and Zoning Commission through a conditional use process.

#### *2.4e Cottage Industries*

The residents of Bethel have a strong entrepreneurial spirit, which is seen in several home-based businesses throughout the Town. Often called “cottage industries,” these are small-scale businesses run out of residents’ homes. While not specified on the land use map, these businesses do have a presence in Town. Bethel wants to encourage cottage industries, while ensuring that it will not infringe on the rights of other residents. Here are some general policies that will guide cottage industries in Bethel:

- Cottage industries are encouraged to promote entrepreneurship and self sufficiency among the residents of Bethel.
- Cottage industries should be regulated by the future land use regulations in Bethel, perhaps as a “conditional use” allowed in all zones.
- When the Town is developing the future land use regulations, it should define some parameters that will guide the establishment and operation of cottage industries. The parameters should include, but not be limited to, noise and parking regulations, storage requirements for heavy equipment, and requirements for hours of operation. The goals of these parameters will be to ensure that cottage industries are compatible with their neighbors but still have the flexibility to operate and flourish economically.

#### *2.4f Recommendations, Future Land Use*

- 1. Follow the Land Use Policies in Section 2.1.** Bethel should follow the land use policies listed in this section when considering any land development application and when developing the land use regulations.
- 2. Follow the recommended land uses shown on Map 3.** Map 3, Future Land Use, is an integral part of this plan. In practice and use, both the text in this plan (specifically in Section \*\*) and Map \*\* should be used in conjunction with one another when making any land use determinations.

### **2.5 Growth and Annexation**

#### *2.5a Annexation*

The Town recognizes that most of the residents of Bethel desire not to pursue annexation at this time. Many feel the Town is unequipped to handle this process and would explore this as an option for the community within future comprehensive plan updates. When considering the goals of the community Bethel may consider annexation **ONLY** after the Town has updated all necessary zoning and subdivision codes. The Town’s charter must also be updated and presented to the Town Council and voters for approval

by referendum.. One such example that may be considered in future comprehensive land use plans is a parcel that is divided by the Town boundary and lies within both the Town of Bethel and Sussex County. This would be done to assist the landowner and to provide greater control of the type of development that might occur on this parcel. These parcels are reflected on Map 4 Boundary Divided Parcels (Future Land Use) and will only be considered when both the Town and the land owner are in agreement and there are supporting approvals from the Planning Commission, President and Council and voters.

### *2.5b Areas of Concern*

Bethel has outlined areas adjacent to and surrounding the Town that it is concerned about if these lands were to be developed. The areas located within the Town of Bethel Area of Concern as defined in Map 5 are not being considered for annexation by the Town. The areas of concern support and define the rural context of Bethel. . The Town believes any change in land use or future development proposals could seriously impact Bethel and its character. Bethel seeks to work with Sussex County and the adjacent communities of Delmar, Laurel and Seaford to encourage activities that will support the goals identified within this comprehensive plan should any land use change be proposed.

### *2.5c Preservation of the Rural Character of Bethel*

#### **A. Transfer of Development Rights**

Transfer of Development Rights, TDR, is a program that provides a mechanism for governments to concentrate residential and other development in desired areas (such as those already served by sewer, water, roads, and other public facilities) while protecting rural landscapes and environmentally sensitive areas. Under a TDR program, the development rights vested in a zoned property (the “sending area”) can be sold to a TDR bank or to a specific developer. Those rights are transferred to another location (the “receiving area”), where they can be applied to increase the density of a development above the maximum specified by that property’s zoning district.

If Sussex County adopts a TDR program or participates in a statewide TDR program in the future, Bethel intends to become a sending area for the TDR program, and encourages its Area of Concern, as shown on Map 5, to do the same. This would result in development elsewhere while protecting the Town’s character and natural habitat. This is consistent with supporting the Town’s goal of preserving its unique character and environmental attributes.

## B. Ag Preservation



The Town supports the continuation of agricultural land uses in the area surrounding the Town where farming has been practiced for centuries. Farming preserves open space for the benefit of residents and visitors and provides a buffer between the Town and encroaching development. Keeping this land in farming restricts the amount of impervious surface cover in the watershed and provides habitat for a variety of species. Agricultural preservation programs should continue to be used to preserve the farmland adjacent to and surrounding the Town of Bethel. The Town encourages the farming community to practice conservation measures, such as the use of adequate stream buffers to protect riparian zones and absorb runoff and pollutants; no-till and contour plowing to reduce soil erosion and runoff; and organic and sustainable farming practices that reduce the impact that farming has on the critical environmental resources in the Bethel area.

### *2.5d Recommendations, Growth and Annexation*

#### **1. Complete the prerequisites before considering annexation as outlined below.**

- **Update Town Charter.** As recommended in Section 2.1, Recommendation 5, The Town Charter continues to serve as the guiding legal document for the Town. It is important that this “living document” be reviewed and updated periodically to ensure it continues to meet the needs of the community. If any changes are identified through the evaluation process, these changes should be amended to the charter before annexation is considered.
- **Develop ordinances and regulations.** The ordinances and regulations recommended in Section 2.1 should be in place to guide development before annexation is considered.

#### **2. Work with Sussex County and other local jurisdictions to develop and encourage a Transfer of Development Rights program.** Some of the agricultural land surrounding the Town is either part of a Purchase Development Rights (PDR) program or an agricultural district. Bethel should work with Sussex County and the local jurisdictions of Delmar, Laurel and Seaford to explore Transfer Development Rights (TDR) options to further the farmland preservation efforts currently taking place around Bethel.



## **2.6 Public Utilities and Services**

### *2.6a Water System*

There is no public water system in Bethel. Water supply in the Town is currently provided by individual wells located on each property. During the public participation process, the Town's questionnaire inquired about the residents' sentiments regarding a public water system and found a very mixed response. Of those who responded to the survey, some felt a public water system was most important, while others felt it was the least important issue of those listed on the survey. Further inquiry into the issue would be needed before it could be determined whether there was or was not enough support for the Town to pursue a private water system. It is important to note that any new large development project in or around Bethel would be required to install a public water system. In the event that this was to happen, the Town should consider the possibility of also incorporating town residents into the public water system.

### *2.6b Wastewater Treatment System*

There is no wastewater treatment provided by either Sussex County or a private wastewater provider. All wastewater services are stand alone systems maintained by property owners.

### *2.6c Solid-Waste Disposal*

Refuse collection services are the responsibility of each individual property owner. Residents and businesses in Bethel arrange for collection through one of several private companies operating in the area. The Delaware Solid Waste Authority (DSWA) operates a 'Recycle Delaware' Center open to the public within the Town of Laurel and at the Woodland Ferry Terminal. Residents may choose to pay for curbside recycling through a private provider. DSWA also operates a collection and transfer station in Hard Scrapple, Delaware.

### *2.6d Storm water Management*

Storm water management is an issue for many towns and is specifically a concern for Bethel residents who are located near the river areas that are more prone to flooding. Few residents complain about flooding on the southern portion of Town near the river and flood

plain areas. Some flooding may be caused by high tides or storm water drainage issues on specific properties. As more impervious surfaces are added to the landscape, the runoff from storms can increase and cause problems. Currently, there are few storm drains or ditches within the Town. Additional development should include measures to address storm water management, and the Town should be cautious in assuming the responsibility for maintaining these facilities. All new development must meet Sussex County Conservation District standards for storm water management. No new development projects (such as new subdivisions on vacant land) may be approved without the approval of the Sussex County Conservation District.

#### *2.6e Plan Recommendations, Public Utilities and Services*

- 1. Evaluate the need for a public water system.** In the future, Bethel should consider the need for a public water system and evaluate the options for providing this service for residents. Currently the Town has a very small budget and individual wells seem to be working adequately. Should any of these conditions change, Bethel could undertake a study to determine how best to address the needs for a public water system.
- 2. Evaluate stormwater issues as related to wetlands.** Storm water problems in Bethel are generally the result of the Town's location near a wetland. It is recommended that Bethel evaluate what can be done to address the storm water problems with regards to drainage into the river and wetlands.
- 3. Develop a formal relationship with Sussex County to explore sewer service.** It is recommended that the leadership of the Town of Bethel contact relevant officials at Sussex County to enter into a dialogue about the expansion of sewer service to the Bethel area. At a minimum, the results of this dialogue could be a Memorandum of Understanding that describes the policy for providing and extending sewer service to properties in and around Bethel.

### **2.7 Community Services and Facilities**

#### *2.7a Police*

The Delaware State Police provide 24-hour police protection for the residents of Bethel when there is an emergency. Bethel has contracted with the Delaware State Police to provide 10-18 hours of law enforcement per week.

#### *2.7b Fire Service*

The Laurel Volunteer Fire Company provides both fire protection and emergency medical services for the residents of Bethel. This is one of the 24 volunteer fire companies operating in Sussex County, and although each has its own district, they all provide mutual assistance when needed. The Laurel Volunteer Fire Company consists of 60 +/- active volunteer firefighters. The fire company operates seven fire engines, one brush truck, one rescue truck, one water rescue boat, and a decontamination truck and trailer.

#### *2.7c Emergency Medical Services*

Bethel residents receive basic life support from the Laurel Fire Department. Emergencies needing advanced life support are handled by Sussex County.

#### *2.7d Education and Library Facilities*

The Town of Bethel is located within the Laurel School District which provides elementary, middle and high schools to local residents. Bethel residents have access to the Laurel Public Library, located off Central Avenue, for a mix of services.

#### *2.7e Senior Services*

No senior services are available in Bethel; however, there are resources for seniors outside of the Town. Laurel Senior Center nearby in Laurel can meet the needs of Bethel residents.

#### *2.7f Health Care*

There are no health care facilities located in Bethel. The Nanticoke Memorial Hospital in Seaford provides health care for Bethel residents.

#### *2.7 g Postal Service*

The US Postal Service has an office located on Main Street in Bethel, which is open every day of the week but Sunday. The postal code for Bethel is 19931.

## *2.7 f Parks and Recreation*



There are two parks in Bethel; one is located along the river, the other is located off First Street near the museum. Throughout the public participation process, the need for a better Town park was mentioned by many residents. Improving and expanding the Town park could work in conjunction with other public requests, such as providing recreational opportunities for younger residents and possibly providing canoe access at the local pier. The Town might also want to consider using the vacant land adjacent to the park as part of a park expansion process.

### *2.7g Plan Recommendations, Community Services and Facilities*

**1. Evaluate the need for a Town park.** During the public participation exercises and the community meetings, the desirability of an expanded Town park with recreational facilities was often mentioned and rated highly in the survey completed by Town residents. Bethel should evaluate the need for and investigate the funding of such a facility in the future.

## **2.8 Transportation**

### *2.8a Regional Transportation*

The main roads in Bethel are under the control of the State through the Delaware Department of Transportation. Bethel Road (Sussex County Road 493) and Vine Street/Beagle Club Road (Sussex County Road 487A) are the primary roads that connect the Town to Business Route 13 which leads to either Seaford or Laurel and the rest of Delaware via US Route 13.

### *2.8b Local Roads*

The Town of Bethel maintains several streets within the Town limits which total about two miles. These streets generally are used for residential uses as opposed to serving regional traffic needs. The Town streets are Community Lane, School Road, First Street, West Street, Pine Street, Main Street, Moore Street, Shady Lane, Sailor's Path and Lewis Street. Snow removal for Bethel is provided by the Town. The street names listed in the Town Charter are different than those actively used by Bethel residents and 911 Emergency Services. Updating the Town Charter will be the simplest course of action to bring current designated street names into alignment with the Town charter.

### *2.8c Transit*

There are no regular state operated DART bus routes passing through the Town. Residents would like to have access to public transportation in the future that connects them to Dover, so they could make connections to the rest of the State. As in all of Delaware, paratransit services are available through DART by reservation to eligible elderly and disabled residents.

### *2.8d Transportation Issues*



There are several main transportation issues for the community:

- The maintenance of local roads to improve health, safety and welfare of local residents. Main Street experiences large volumes of truck traffic which has identified this road as an alternate to US Route 13 and US Route 50 in Maryland.
- The maintenance and upkeep of the bridge on Bethel Road (Sussex County Road 493). This bridge serves as a major connector between the Town and Sussex County and over the past several years has seen an increase in traffic impact the safety and appearance of the bridge.
- Traffic volume along Bethel Road (Sussex County Road 493) as related to the high speed, noise and additional pollution of traffic

which uses the road as an alternate route for through traffic off US Route 13.

- The Intersection of Woodland Ferry Road (Sussex County Road 78) and Bethel Road (Sussex County Road 493). This serves as a major intersection for the community and often has several traffic accidents per year. Improvements should be considered to address public safety.

The Community is encouraged to work with Del-Dot to develop short term and long term solutions to their concerns.

### *2.8e Woodland Ferry*

The Delaware Department of Transportation Woodland Ferry Terminal offers limited fishing and recreational access to the Nanticoke River. In addition, this daily operated ferry provides a more scenic route to Seaford, Delaware and points in Maryland.

### *2.8f Recommendations, Transportation*

- 1. Evaluate solutions to the traffic and heavy truck usage on Main Street and Bethel Road.** Bethel should evaluate both enforcement and design based solutions to traffic on Main Street and the high volume of heavy trucks that pass through the Town along this road to improve safety, reduce noise and lessen pollution.
- 2. Update the street names in the Town Charter.** Bethel should update the Town Charter to list the Town's street names as they are currently being used.

## **2.9 Community Character and Design**

### *2.9a Context*

The Town of Bethel was originally established around the Bethel Landing, which provided boat access to Broad Creek. As one of the smallest communities in Delaware, Bethel residents enjoy a tranquil, rural atmosphere. Though not located far to the west of Laurel, Bethel has had its small-town atmosphere protected and enhanced by the agricultural areas to the north, east and west of Town. The Town of Bethel is defined as a Rural Historic District listed on the National Register of Historic Places. This District is recognized for its agricultural landscape. The Town of Bethel has four properties individually listed in the National Register of Historic Places, and the historic core of the Town has been determined eligible for listing by the Delaware Division of Historical and Cultural Affairs staff for compliance with federal environmental laws. (Where is this information – we couldn't find it on the National Historic Register

website? We see only the district not individual homes.) Bethel's historical context, strong maritime heritage, and small-town atmosphere set it apart from other Delaware municipalities.

#### *2.9b Land Use and Design*

The predominant land uses within Bethel are residential and agricultural. The Town is also surrounded by agriculture and open space. The rural character of the Town is one of its defining features. The majority of the houses in the Town are of the single-family, detached variety. Like most historic homes, they are typically a mix of both larger and smaller lots than modern homes. Another characteristic of historic houses and buildings are the small setbacks from the street, apparent in most homes located in the Town. The Town values the historic character of Bethel, and has identified this as a desirable asset that should be maintained. Bethel has some land left within the Town that could be developed, and the Town is vulnerable because there are insufficient zoning codes currently in place. A single development could greatly alter the character of the Town. It is imperative to develop land use regulations that permit new development and encourage it to fit in with the character of this unique small Town.

#### *2.9c Recommendations, Community Character*

- 1. Preserve the Town's historic character.** Bethel should protect its historic character by maintaining the current historic structures within the Town by creating a historical commission. In addition, Bethel should encourage any new construction to be consistent with the historical style of the current homes. The Town of Bethel should consider working with the Division of Historical and Cultural Affairs to list the eligible historical core in the National Register of Historic Places. The Town could also maintain the historical character through the adoption of historical architectural guidelines and/or standards that could be developed in partnership with the State Housing Authority.
- 2. Encourage new development to fit in with the Town of Bethel.** New development should be designed to fit in with Bethel. This can be accomplished by connecting new streets to the existing Town street system and arranging lots and setbacks consistent with existing homes in Town. Bethel can write land use regulations that permit and encourage these techniques.
- 3. Explore Agricultural Preservation Options.** Part of what makes Bethel unique is its rural context and surrounding farmlands. The Delaware Agriculture Lands Preservation Program protects thousands of acres of farmland each year. There are other programs through the county and private conservation organizations that have the same goals. Bethel should start a dialogue with citizens, local farmers, and the Department of Agriculture to determine what role farmland protection can play in maintaining the rural character and setting of the Town.

## **2.10 Redevelopment**

### *2.10a Redevelopment Potential*

Although the majority of houses in Bethel are well maintained, there are some residential properties in the Town that are in poor condition and in need of repair and maintenance. Their redevelopment will improve the aesthetic appeal of the Town and has the potential to improve property values throughout Bethel. The Town needs to remain cognizant of property maintenance issues because older homes, which make up most of the housing stock in Bethel, often have more maintenance issues than newer homes.

### *2.10b Recommendations, Redevelopment*

**1. Code Enforcement.** Bethel should develop a code enforcement plan which includes penalties to ensure the housing stock is properly maintained. It is crucial that the inspections be systematic, fair, and consistent in order to be effective. Due to Bethel's size, it is unlikely that a full time enforcement officer is needed or could be funded by the Town. Bethel should explore other options, such as hiring part time code enforcement officers or working with Sussex County on enhanced enforcement in the Town.

## **3.0 Implementation Actions and Recommendations**

### **3.1 Planning Goals**

Goal: To maintain the small Town atmosphere and rural setting through the adoption of appropriate zoning and land use ordinances.

Goal: To encourage modest growth that is in tune with existing growth within the community.

Goal: To preserve the rural atmosphere by balancing the protection of rural land with the needs of residents.

Goal: To restore and maintain Broad Creek so it continues to be a source of recreation and economic opportunity to the community.

Goal: To ensure the protection of natural resources for the enjoyment and health of the existing and future residents of the community.



Goal: To encourage the development and implementation of a historical preservation program to protect these cultural resource within the community.

### 3.2 Vision for Bethel

Bethel is a small, historic, rural town with a rich history of agricultural and maritime heritage that will maintain its small town character while allowing for modest growth and redevelopment that is consistent with its surroundings and current community character.

### 3.3 Short and Long Term Objectives

**Update Town Charter.** Section 2.5 requires the revision and modernization of the Town Charter. These updates should be amended to the charter before annexation is considered. (Short Term Goal)

**Develop ordinances and regulations.** The ordinances and regulations recommended in Section 2.5 should be in place to guide development before annexation is considered. (Short Term Goal)

**Update the street names in the Town Charter.** Bethel should update the Town Charter to list the Town's street names as they are currently being used. (Short Term Goal)

**Preserve the Town's historical character.** Bethel should protect its historical character by maintaining the current historical structures within the Town by creating a historical commission. In addition, Bethel should encourage any new construction to be consistent with the historical style of the current homes. The Town of Bethel should consider working with the Division of Historical and Cultural Affairs to list the eligible historic core in the National Register of Historic Places. The Town could also maintain the historical character through the adoption of historical architectural guidelines and/or standards. (Long Term Goal)

**Encourage new development to fit in with the Town of Bethel.** New development should be designed to fit in with Bethel. This can be accomplished by connecting new streets to the existing Town street system and arranging lots and setbacks consistent with existing homes in Town. Bethel can adopt land use regulations that permit and encourage these techniques. (Short Term Goal)

**Explore Agricultural Preservation Options.** Part of what makes Bethel unique is its rural context and surrounding farmlands. The Delaware Agriculture Lands Preservation Program protects thousands of acres of farmland each year. There are other programs through the county and private conservation organizations that have the same goals. Bethel should start a dialogue with citizens, local farmers, and the Department of Agriculture to determine what role farmland protection can play in maintaining the rural character and setting of the Town. (Long Term Goal)

**Code Enforcement.** Bethel should develop a code enforcement plan which includes penalties to ensure the housing stock is properly maintained. It is crucial that the inspections be systematic, fair, and consistent in order to be effective. Due to Bethel's size, it is unlikely that a full time enforcement officer is needed or could be funded by the Town. Bethel should explore other options, such as hiring part time code enforcement officers or working with Sussex County on enhanced enforcement in the Town. (Short & Long Term Goal)

**Work with Sussex County on the Transfer of Development Rights program.** Most of the agricultural land surrounding the Town is either part of a Purchase Development Rights (PDR) program or an agricultural district. Bethel should work with Sussex County to explore Transfer Development Rights (TDR) options to further the farmland preservation efforts currently taking place around Bethel. (Short & Long Term Goal)

**Work with DNREC, Sussex County and FEMA to update Floodplain Maps.** Residents would benefit from the continued partnership to address the necessary update of the FEMA flood plain maps. (Long Term Goal)

**Work with DNREC and Sussex County to protect natural resources.** The community would meet many of the residents' interests by expanding this partnership to further protect and enhance these resources. (Long Term Goal)

**Continue to utilize, protect and conserve Broad Creek.** The community's history and heritage is tied to this resource. The community should explore opportunities to promote this resource while provided possible protective measures. (Long Term Goal)

**Work with DNREC to develop TMDL's for the Nanticoke / Broad Creek Watershed.** The Nanticoke River and Broad Creek are under review for pollutants. The community should consider how to best address this issue through conservation measures, possible regulation, etc. (Long Term Goal)

**Work with the Delaware Forest Service to expand Urban Forestry activities.** This partnership would provide the opportunity to expand forest resources while educating residents. The community should work to become a Tree City USA community further enhancing the quality of life for residents. (Short Term Goal)

**Evaluate the need for a public water system.** In the future, Bethel should consider the need for a public water system and evaluate the options for providing this service for residents. Currently the Town has a very small budget and individual wells seem to be working adequately. Should any of these conditions change, Bethel could undertake a study to determine how best to address the needs for a public water system. (Long Term Goal)

**Evaluate storm water issues as related to wetlands.** Storm water problems in Bethel are generally the result of the Town's location near a wetland. It is recommended that Bethel evaluate what can be done to address the storm water problems with regards to drainage into the river and wetlands. (Long Term Goal)

**Develop a formal relationship with Sussex County to explore sewer service.** It is recommended that the leadership of the Town of Bethel contact relevant officials at Sussex County to enter into a dialogue about the expansion of sewer service to the Bethel area. At a minimum, the results of this dialogue could be a Memorandum of Understanding that describes the policy for providing and extending sewer service to properties in and around Bethel. (Long Term Goal)

**Evaluate the need for a Town park.** During the public participation exercises and the community meetings, the desirability of an expanded Town park with recreational facilities was often mentioned and rated highly in the survey completed by Town residents. Bethel should evaluate the need for and investigate the funding of such a facility in the future. (Long Term Goal)

**Evaluate solutions to the traffic and heavy truck usage on Main Street and Bethel Road.** Bethel should evaluate both enforcement and design based solutions to traffic on Main Street and Bethel Road and the high volume of heavy trucks that pass through the Town along this road to improve safety, reduce noise and lessen pollution. (Short Term Goal)

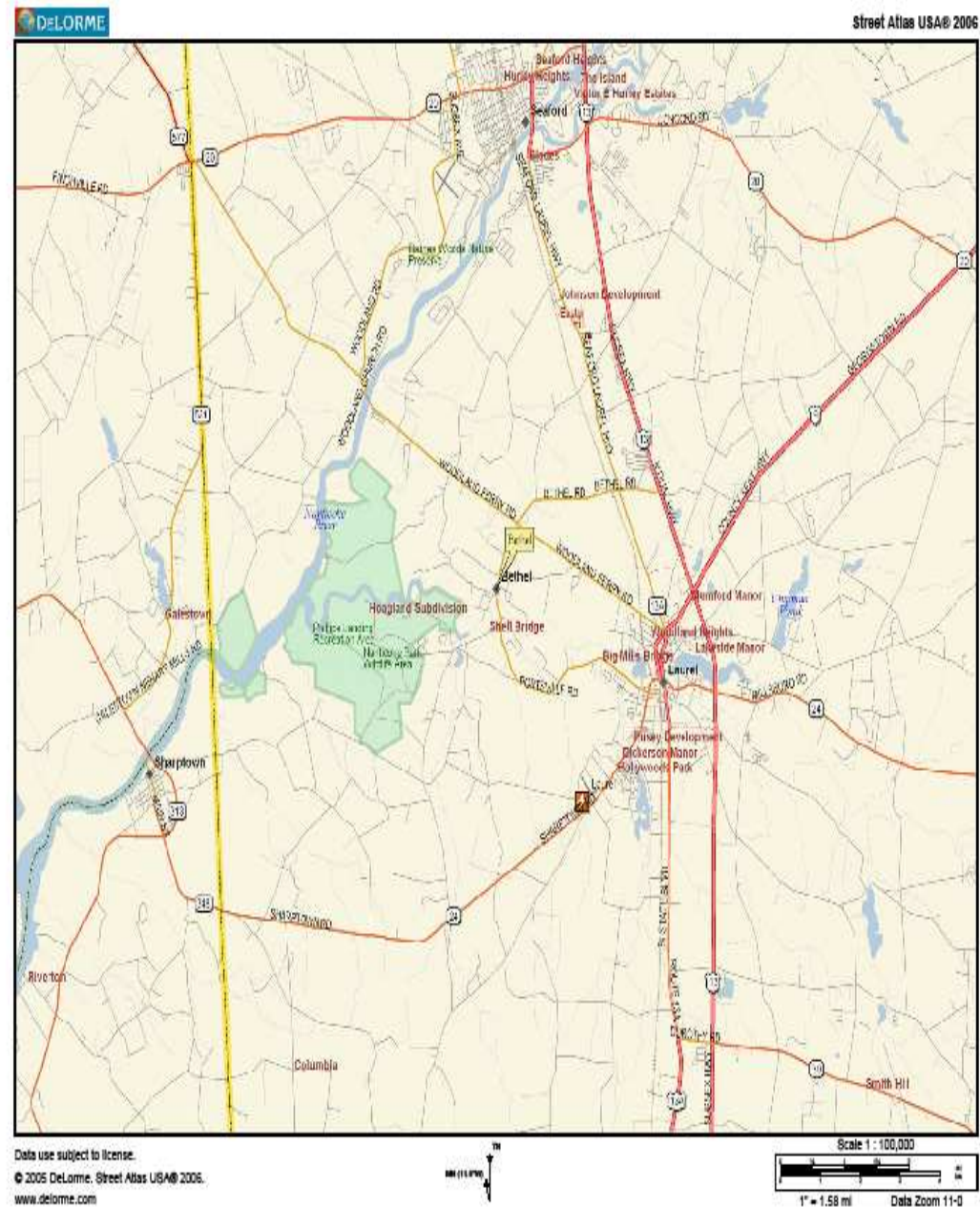


## Town of Bethel

### *Location Map*

Sources:  
DeLorme Maps and Atlases

Notes:  
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## Town of Bethel

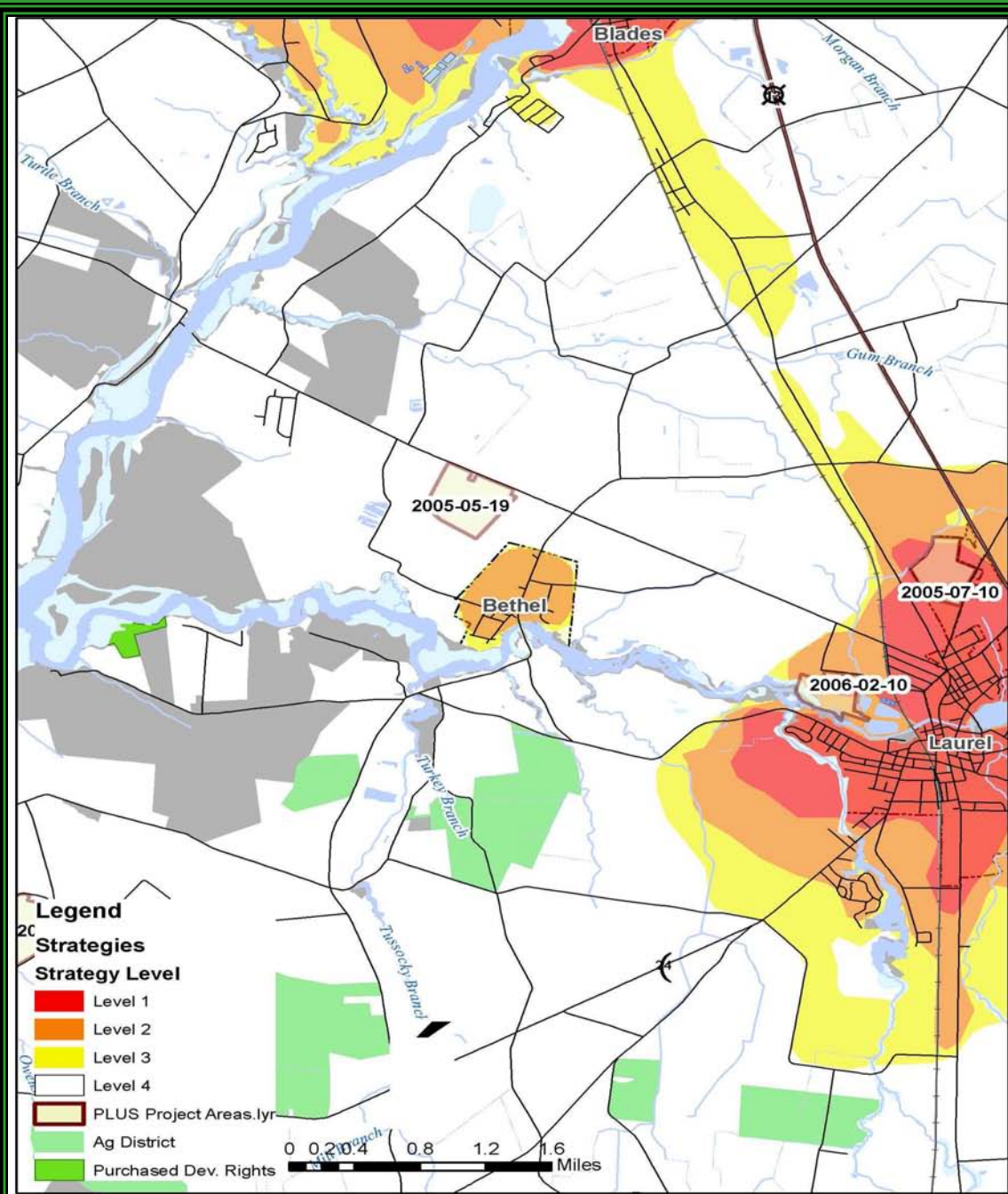
### Map 1 - Strategies for Policy and Spending Classification Map

#### Sources:

Office of State Planning and Coordination

#### Notes:

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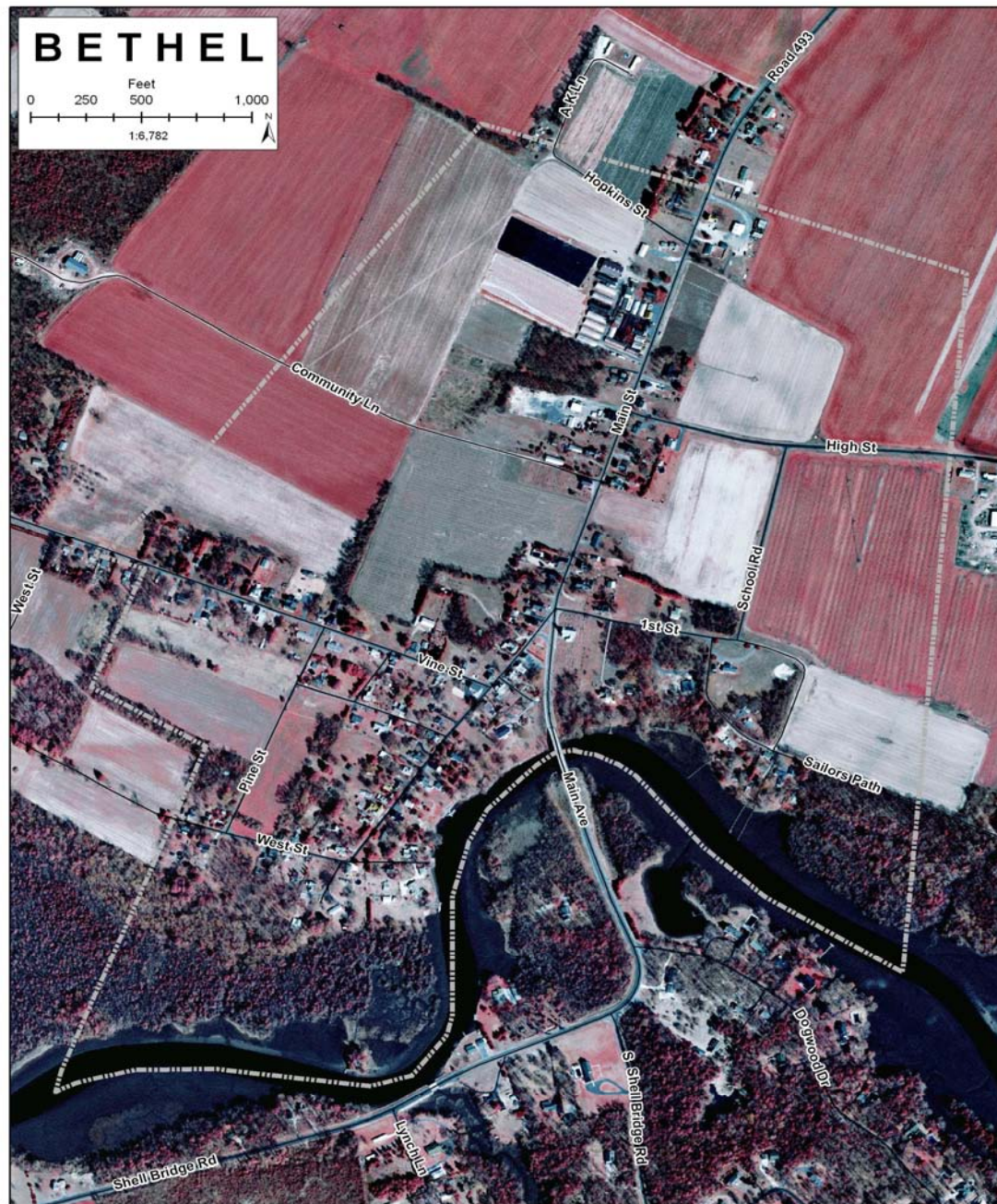


## Town of Bethel

### Map 2 - Aerial Photography

Sources:  
Office of State Planning and Coordination

Notes:  
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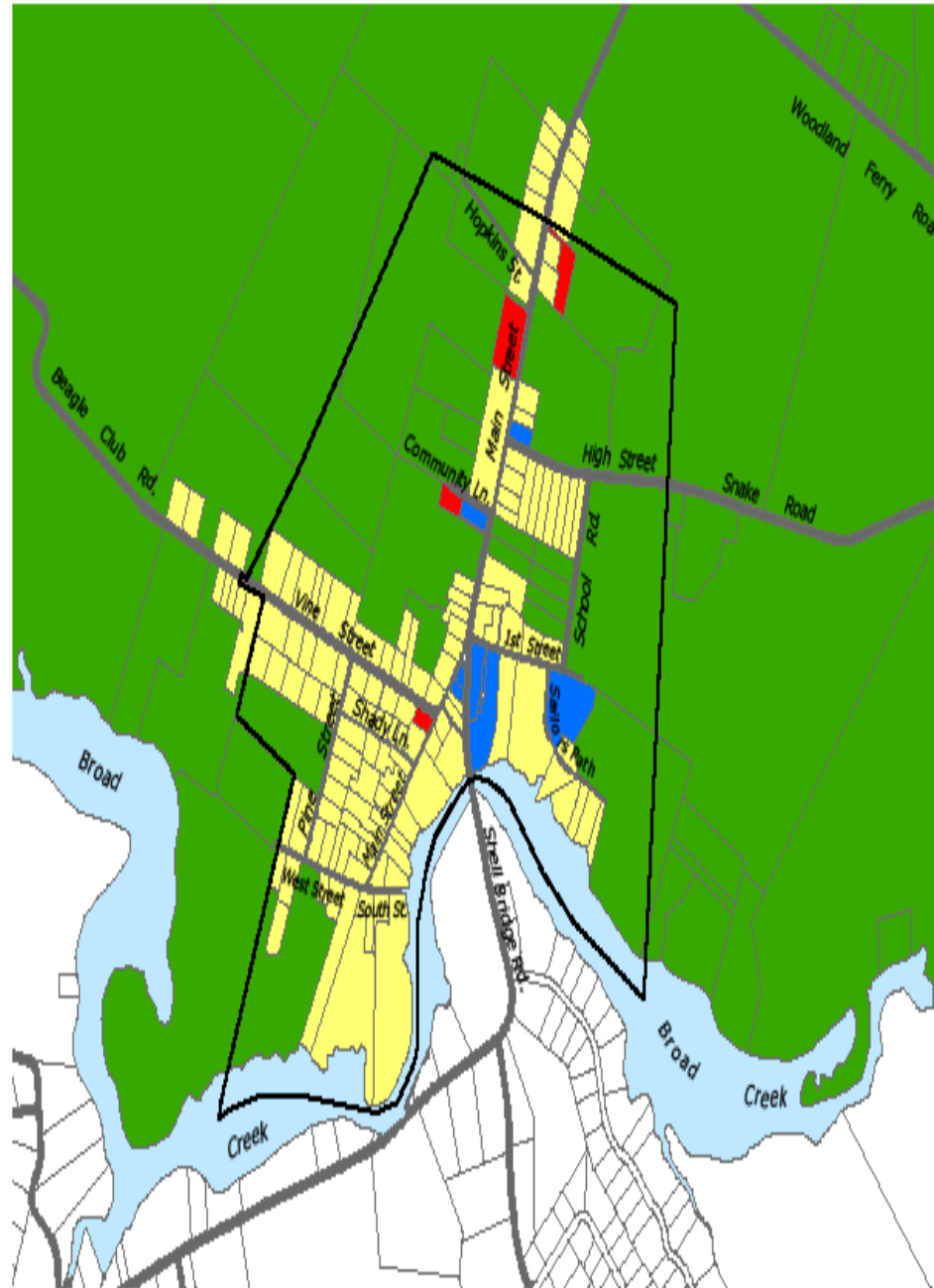


## Town of Bethel

### Map 3 - *Current and Future Zoning*

Sources:  
Office of State Planning and Coordination

Notes:  
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## Existing and Future Land Use

Town of Bethel,  
Sussex County, Delaware

### Draft For Review

- Agriculture/  
Natural Resources
- Residential
- Commercial
- Institutional
- Town Boundary



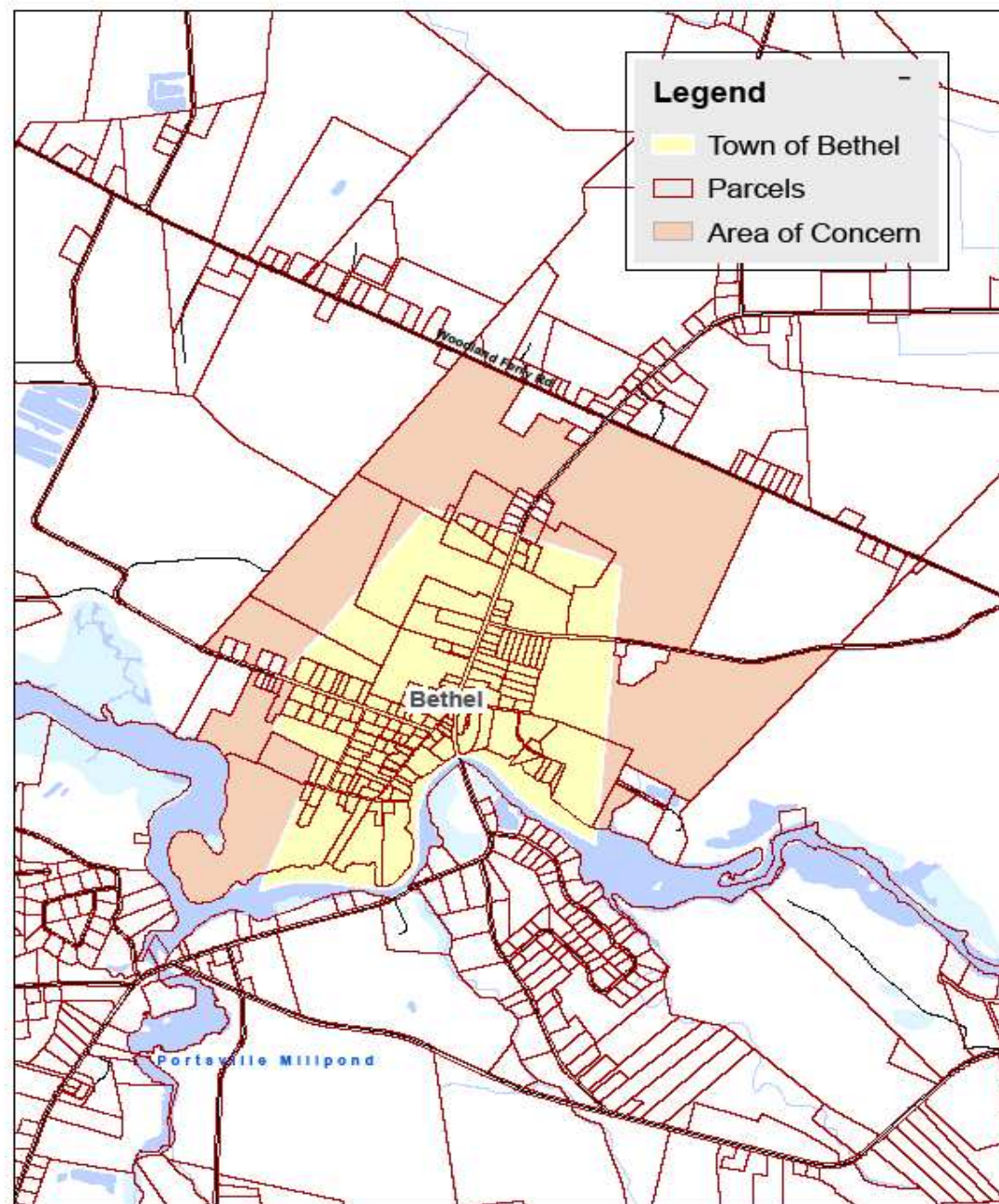


## Town of Bethel

### Map 4 - *Boundary Divided Parcels / Future Land Use Map*

Sources:  
Office of State Planning and Coordination

Notes:  
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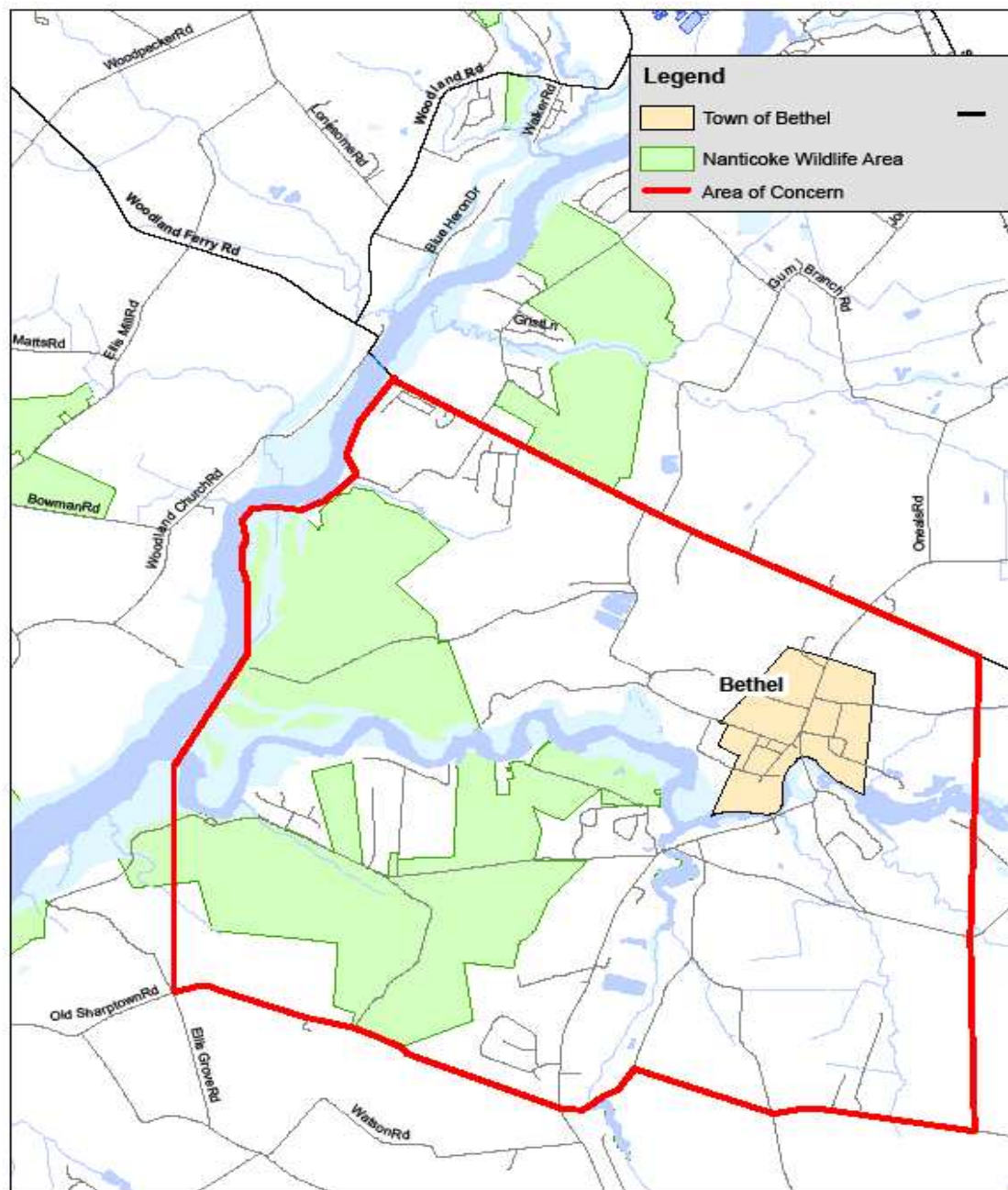


## Town of Bethel

### Map 5 - Area of Concern

Sources:  
Office of State Planning and Coordination

Notes:  
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## Town of Bethel - Map 6

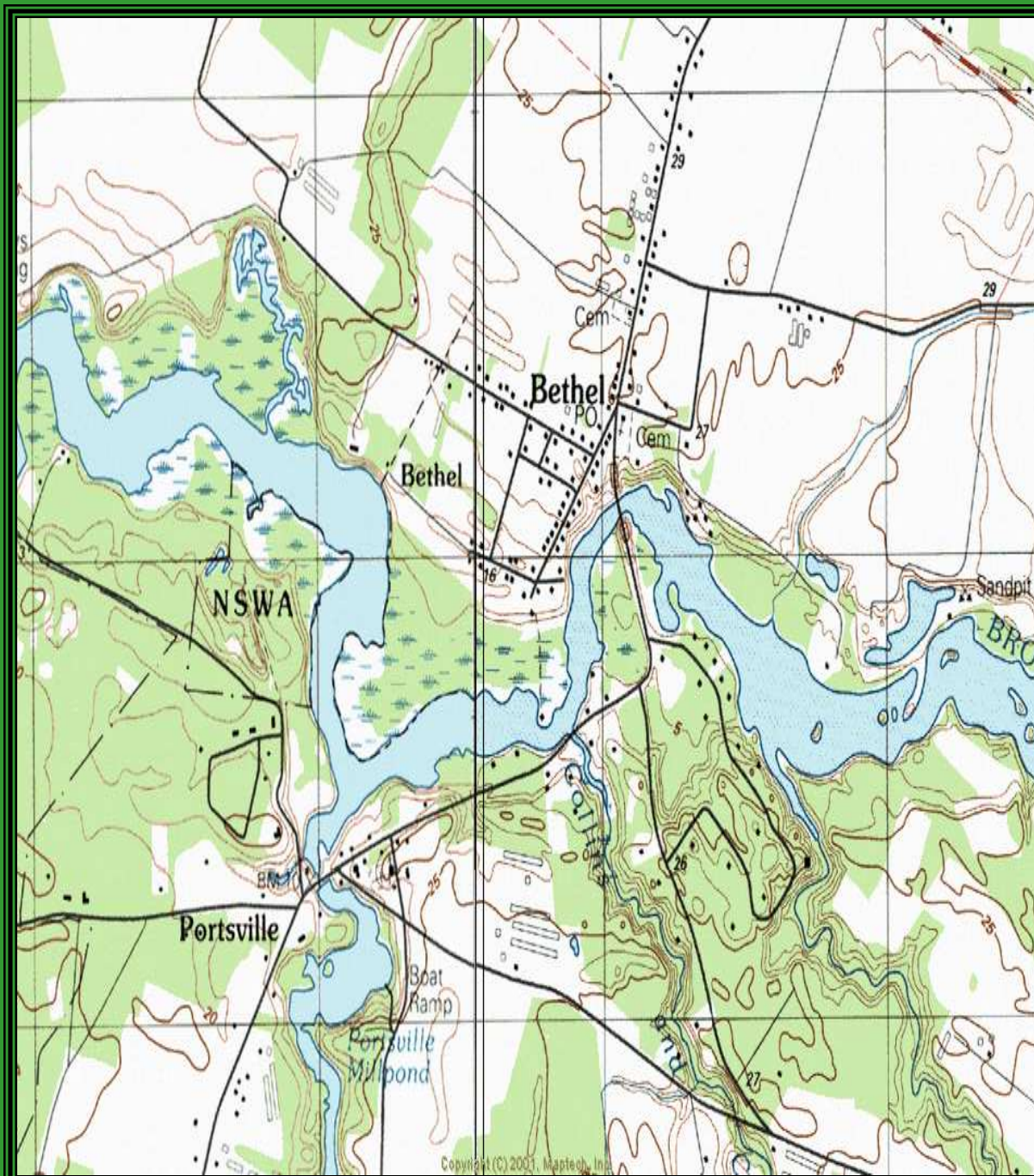
### *Topography and Flood Plain*

#### Sources:

Office of State Planning and Coordination and the USGS Service

#### Notes:

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## Town of Bethel

### Map 7 - *Environmental Features*

#### Sources:

Office of State Planning and Coordination and  
State of Delaware Data-Mill

#### Notes:

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